

Body and blood - bread and wine: discussion (2)

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Preacher: Philip Wells

[0:00] ...partaking at the table. So it's not who should be watching, but who should actually be eating and drinking.! And I think our judgments and views could be that such and such is essential.

! I have a little problem getting the pen to work right. Essential. Desirable. Doesn't matter one way or another. Neutral.

Undesirable. And that one is going to say unacceptable except it went off the edge of the paper. Okay, so is it essential? Desirable, but not essential.

Is it neutral? Is it undesirable or completely unacceptable? So my list, which is a sort of list in a certain order, absolutely everyone.

So is it like when we say, all welcome to come to church? And all welcome to come to church and all welcome to come to the table.

[1:07] What about people under church discipline? What about the whole of... So I put XYZ church meaning a particular church. In our case it's Calvary Evangelical Church, isn't it?

So I just put that there. Fill in the name of the church as such. Is it... What about the whole of the church? What about most of the church?

What about people who visit, who when you talk to them at the door say, Oh, I'm a Christian. I go to St. Ebbs or I go to Holland Road or something.

So they are visiting, professing Christians. Professing means that's what they say they are. That's what they say about themselves. And I put here, regular believers, that's people who come on regularly to our church, but who are not members of the church.

People who are regular, come along regularly, but are not baptized. People who regularly come along, but are not converted Christians.

[2:16] Now, of course, the question is who thinks they are not converted Christians. And let's say that... Let's put it this way.

If most of us were to talk to this person, we would most likely come to the conclusion this person hasn't yet quite understood what it is to be a Christian. So that's the sort of situation.

OK, does that make sense? So what I would like us to do is to try and find out which of these squares we think is most appropriate.

So there's eight categories there. Now, do you think if you got with two other people, you could easily think which of those as a group you thought the tick ought to go in?

Do you think you could do that? Yes. Oh, good. That's encouraging. Pardon? Yeah, well, that's one. That's... So could you do that?

[3:18] Can you find two other people? So there's a group of three of you. And work your way through that as quickly as possible. You don't have to stop and say particularly why. And if you get stuck, go on to the next one.

This is really for guidance rather than as a final verdict on anything. Do you want paper?

No, I don't have any paper. I ask you to be ready to share your thoughts on this. Now, if we get into having long conversations, we've got a microphone here.

But if it becomes just a yes or no, we probably don't need the microphone. I'm thinking we've got 10 minutes or so of time. So we're not going to sort out every nuance of this.

And I think we would... We'd have to agree... No, we wouldn't have to agree. But I think we would be sensible to bear in mind that church life is not neat.

[4:25] You try and make it neat. But sometimes it isn't precisely neat. And if we insist that everything is totally neat, I think we'll almost certainly tie ourselves up in one knot or another.

Anyway, let's see what we thought. For everyone to be present at the table, everybody who comes along to the meeting, how many people thought it was essential that everybody that was present came along?

I didn't think you would. Anybody thought it was desirable? No. Everybody thought it didn't matter. Everybody thought that it was undesirable? Anybody think it was unacceptable?

Okay, so we've got... If I put a tick there, that's most people think that the idea of having a communion table in which you just try and get everybody to come in is an unacceptable method. For people who are under church discipline... Now, is it essential that they come, desirable that they come? Doesn't matter whether they come or not. Undesirable or unacceptable.

[5:31] So when I say church discipline here, I'm imagining somebody who, say, living in adultery and has been warned and is unrepentant. So let's... I think we're going to be over here somewhere. Who thought it was undesirable?

Just a little flick of the hand there. But how many people thought it was unacceptable? Okay, if I put a tick there, because that's where most people seem to be.

I'm going to try and put a tick there. That's better. Anybody want to say different? I think Paul would say it's unacceptable for somebody under church discipline.

They should be excluded. Right. The whole of the church, meaning to say everybody who is signed up on the membership list. So I think we're at this end now.

Is it essential that everybody comes? In other words, if one or two people are missing, do we all say, that's it, go home, because we're not all here? Does it not matter?

[6:36] Is it... What... Desirable. Desirable. How many people were going for desirable? Two. Okay. How many people are differing from that? Because Penny didn't put her hand up.

So what did you... Were you thinking desirable? Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Good. It's desirable. That most of the church should be there.

Now, this is an interesting one because it's saying... Because I have been to churches where they have communion in a little room at the back and people sort of opt into that, but other people are standing around talking.

And that was considered okay. So if some of the church were there, it was okay. But if everybody else is doing something else, that didn't matter too much. So for most of the church to be here, I presume we're in this area, neutral, desirable, essential.

Anybody thought that it didn't matter particularly much? I'm sorry? I agree. Although I have to say I've been to a church where I think that seemed to be the thought.

[7:47] That it's desirable that most of the church should be there. Or essential that most of the church should be there. How many people thought desirable? One, two, three, four, five.

Five. So I put five there. How many people thought it was essential that most of the church should be there? One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

So more people thought it was essential. That's interesting, isn't it? So it loses quite a lot if most of the church isn't there, according to those voting figures.

Is that fair enough? Is that a fair enough reflection of the views that were expressed? Visiting professing Christians. So, Roberto, that is you.

You're a visiting professing Christian. So is it essential that these people join in? Desirable, it doesn't matter either way. Undesirable or unacceptable?

[8:51] Right, how many people went for desirable? Okay, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven.

How many people went for essential? Okay. So I think it was something like two and eleven.

Sorry? You can't force people. You can't force people. Oh, no. No, you can't force people. You can't force people. Oh, no. No, you can't force people. I think the thought...

That's true. You can't force people. But I think the idea that the invitation is made so that visiting professing Christians have an invitation that they would be welcome to come.

I think that's the thought that we're getting at. So that Roberto would be invited to come to the table. We know him.

[9:48] I mean, sometimes there will be people who are total strangers, but the current practice is that we say all those who love the Lord and who are walking in fellowship with him and with his people are welcome to come.

So that's taking the view of the communion-taking church as being all those people who are trusting the Lord, walking with him.

Let's come down to here. Regular believers who are non-members. Non-members. Now, they might be non-members because, well, there's all sorts of reasons.

They might say, well, I just can't quite commit to this church for some reason or another. Maybe they say, well, I don't have... I can't spare the time.

I'm not at liberty to come as regularly as we know you people at Calvary would like. Take, for example, that. So regular believers who are non-members, would we say it was essential for them to come to the table?

[10:55] Desirable, neither here nor there. Undesirable, unacceptable. Let's... How many people thought it was essential for them to come? Two.

Of course, again, you come up against the fact you can't make them come. Desirable for them to come. Okay, well, that's a lot. So... Halfway. Sorry?

You're halfway between. They're in neutral. Desirable. Oh, desirable and neutral. Okay. Well, I think there was about 15 people. So anybody like to plump for neutral, too?

It doesn't matter neither way. Okay, so Chris was moving in that direction, were you? Slightly. Yeah. But... No, it's just that you get to a tango between five and six.

Because if you say it's desirable for professing Christians... Yeah, you better use the microphone, I think, here. Yeah.

[11:59] Yeah. I can see why you would be into desirable. Because otherwise, if you were very... Saying it's desirable for professing Christians under five.

So here we are talking about in number six, they are professing Christians. They just don't happen to be members of the church. Yeah. But, of course, you might challenge why they're not prepared to be members of the church.

Yes. Yeah. Can I make a comment on that? Mm. Of course, what you've put under five is just visiting professing Christians.

Yes. You could have worded that as saying those who are members of other gospel churches.

Yeah. Which... Which wasn't quite the same thing and therefore might slightly change your answer.

But, I mean, I sort of assumed that was what you meant, but it's not quite the same thing. No, it's not quite the same thing. I suppose that there's a sort of real politic about it.

[13:01] If somebody turns up and you've said, welcome to all professing Christians, and the person says, I'm a professing Christian, you probably are not easily in a position to find out very much more about them.

But, yep. Okay. You also said that some churches don't even have membership. Yes. Yes. Yes. Let's come to regular believers.

So they come along regularly. We know them. But they're not baptized. Essential that they come.

Desirable that they come. It doesn't matter either way. Undesirable that they come.

Unacceptable that they come. Right. How many people are thinking desirable that these people come? 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.

How many people think it's neutral? It doesn't matter either way. How many people think it's undesirable that non-baptised believers come to the table?

[14:15] One. One. How do you stop beating your wife? I haven't stopped beating my wife, if that was the question.

It's an interesting, wasn't it? Because there's a, like Chris was saying, there's a sort of pastoral dimension here. That if somebody is coming along regularly and they're a believer and they're not baptised.

I really want to ask that person, now come on now. You want to come to the table. Doesn't it make an awful lot of sense for you to be baptised? What's the problem? So you get into that sort of

territory, don't you?

Okay. Yeah, sorry, go on. Well, I think. My wife was on the Salvation Army, and so she's on the afternoon and we were officially together, because we went out to some of the new suspects, and when we went to the church after, we were going to be, and she got baptized up there, but she was a big one, very much involved in the Salvation Army, but as you know, the Salvation Army, which I can't understand, do you not have any communion?

To me, I consider her belief, and her development in the Salvation Army practice, who qualify her?

[15:59] Now, I don't know all the world, and what do you think of? Of course, they don't have baptism by immersion, which, again, two feet are pretty difficult, but I know, okay, they're exclusive to you as well, why you can't handle it, but they need some changes.

They can't handle it. They can't handle it. They can't handle it. They can't handle it. They can't handle it. They can't handle it. They can't handle it. They can't handle it. They can't handle it. They can't handle it. They can't handle it. They can't handle it.

They can't handle it. They can't handle it. They can't handle it. They can't handle it. They can't handle it. They can't handle it. They can't handle it. They can't handle it.

Okay, right. Well, we've got all sorts of things there. Because there's anomalies, aren't there? So if you take a Salvation Army, good-hearted, dear, strong, believing Christian people, and yet they don't see eye to eye with most of us on baptism and on the Lord's Supper.

So I can think of a Salvation Army lady that I know had her round to lunch. And if it was communion, personally, I would welcome her.

[17:16] But because in her conscience, she's doing what God has wanted to do. I think she's just mistaken. But I think I would want to express fellowship with her.

Anyway, there's a question mark there, isn't there? And I think there are question marks that arise. Can we do this last one? Regular attenders who are unconverted. Unacceptable. Do we think it's essential for them to come to the table?

Desirable. Doesn't matter. Undesirable or unacceptable. How many people say undesirable? How many people say undesirable? One, two.

How many people say unacceptable? Right, okay. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen.

Okay. Unacceptable. So that's quite a strong statement. So that's saying... I feel strongly. Yes. Well, that's an interesting statistic.

[18:13] But you've got to go back on what you said about what these people may think themselves as well.

Pastoral dimension. It means the people who consider themselves to have faith and that they're trusting Jesus Christ. So are you wanting to make a judgment upon the reality of that faith?

Because this was professing Christians. Somebody who says of themselves, I'm a Christian.

But we might get the funny situation of somebody who says, I'm a Christian. And it still hasn't dawned on them that being a Christian is you have to be born again.

Or it still hasn't dawned on them that being a Christian is not just living a good life. And although they've heard it loads and loads of times, it still hasn't quite clicked. So that's the question there.

Yes. Yes. Somebody who believes they're a Christian.

[19:22] Yes. But in their language and talking to them, you understand they're not a Christian. Yep. I suppose I have made a judgment.

We're getting towards the church discipline thing here. So if somebody's living in a way which sort of demonstrably, measurably, is falling short of that.

Sorry? Just the little things they say. Ah, okay. Little things. Little things. Hmm. They haven't made a decision for Jesus. Just those little things they say, you understand that they're not Christian.

Yes, and that's why I'm a judgment. But it's not a judgment. Yes, but I think the Bible tells us to make assessments, doesn't it?

Yes. It's a assessment. Yes. I'm making assessments. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. I mean, one of the things I would like to result from this discussion is what you expect, what we as a church expect of whoever's presiding.

[20:28] So what is expected in this case of, we can probably think of people that we guess are in this category, what is, is it expected that somebody presiding says, so and so, I know you think you're a Christian, but you're not, and you're not coming to the table.

Or just how would we expect that to be worded, and how would we expect that to be actioned? Yes. Well, you can say something, Roberto.

Yes. My question is on number eight. If someone is unconverted, why should they take the communion? Yes. Is the communion only bread and wine, or is sharing Christ and his resurrection? If they are unconverted, that's why I'm, even number seven, I put very similar, very, very similar situation. If someone is a believer, why is not baptized?

So that's, again, goes into the pastoral care under the authority of the church deciding who. Usually, if it's unconverted, it's a strange language for them, the communion.

[21:53] It's just bread and wine. Yes. No meaning. Yeah. I mean, let's put it the other way around, because I remember talking to Graham Nichols at the church formerly known as Hayward's Heath Evangelical Free Church, which is now called Christ Church Hayward's Heath.

And he said, to have unconverted people present at the communion is a great opportunity to preach the gospel. He's not saying that they come to the table, but to have them observing is a great opportunity to preach the gospel.

I'm sorry? If you partake, you're saying you're in on it.

Yes, but what Graham is saying is that to see what it is to be in on it is a wonderful testimony to people who are outside as to what they're missing. So just from the point of view of somebody who would end up presiding, I'd just be interested on what we think is a...

Because quite often we say... Yeah. Steve? I would think that you do need to see it in pastoral terms. I mean, obviously you can't...

[23:10] Unless you're going to go over to the sort of old Scottish way of sort of greeting everybody and giving them a token, then you can't be absolutely sure. But you could say, and I would actually say it's not necessarily the responsibility of the person who's actually presiding, but probably of the elders, in fact, that if you're really concerned...

Well, because it's the authority of the church that's being exercised. It's a church thing, yes. Yeah, it's the authority of the church that's being exercised. And, you know, as an elder you might want to just go and say to somebody privately, well, you know, are you sure about this?

Because, you know, I'm not sure. You wouldn't want to do that a minute before the communion. No, well, that's the problem. Yeah. So, you know, in a sense, you kind of have to be on the lookout for it, I guess.

It's... Yeah. Yeah. I mean, maybe if you had somebody who was a regular attender, but the elders, as they got to know this person, really didn't think they were converted, and yet they were attending communion and possibly taking part, then, obviously not five minutes before communion, but at some other time, a discussion might take place.

Yep. Yep. Thank you very much. Good. Yes. A question about number four. No, I've got a strong boy. Sorry. A question about number four.

[24:53] Yes. You say most of the church. Most of the church. Now, imagine we go communion tonight. Yes. Instead of being 30 people, we are only three. Do you cancel the communion? That's a good question.

That's a very good question because it's sort of saying, we're in the habit of having communion in the evening, when we know that in many cases, for example, if it's mum and dad and child, either mum or dad will be at home looking after a child.

So we know that we're not going to have the whole of the church. That's a good question, isn't it? Is it something that we should do if we know that most people are not going to be there?

That's a good question. Well, I'll tell you what. I'm going to leave that. And here is something. See, my wife wouldn't let me do that last week, but I will go on anyway.

This is what I wanted to think about. And we're out of time, so we won't. But help and advice for coming to the table. What would we like to say to the person who is presiding?

[26:05] How can the person presiding help the people coming to the table? I think there's things that we might say to this person.

Please do such and such. And we might say to them, please don't such and such else.

So I don't mean things like, you know, you always stand in that funny way and it's very off-putting, that sort of thing. But more in terms of principle. And things that it would be helpful in or to myself to think, what should I be thinking as I come to the table?

And I think that would be a fruitful subject for a discussion perhaps at another time. But I think as part of developing coming to the table, I think those are some thoughts that we ought to think through.

What's a helpful thing for the person presiding to do? What's actually unhelpful for that person presiding to do? And how can I help myself?

[27:17] What should I have in my head? What sort of prayer should I be praying? What should my expectations be? Sorry, time's up. Let's sing together.